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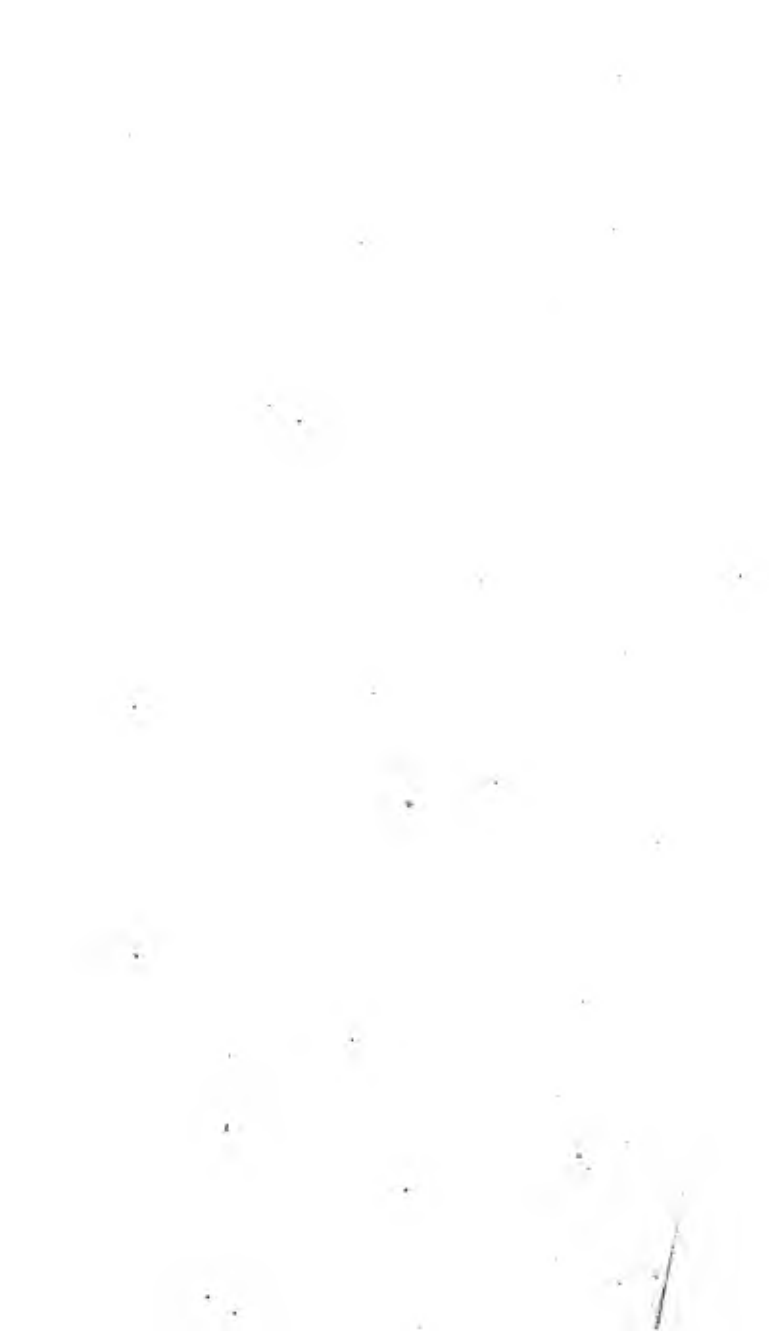
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THE ART OF E. H. BREWSTER  
AND ACHSAH BREWSTER



ACHSAH AND E. H. BREWSTER AT BHAWANI HOUSE

*Almora, 1943*

# THE ART

*of*

E. H. Brewster &  
Achsah Brewster

By

M. S. RANDHAWA, I.C.S.

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# THE ART OF E. H. BREWSTER AND ACHSAH BREWSTER

I often heard strange stories about Kalimat and its interesting international population of Dutch, French, and American citizens, who had come to the Himalayas in search of the secrets of "Yoga" and Indian spiritualism. On my walks towards the lorry-stand, I had often seen Sorensen, a Swiss Sadhu, wearing a saffron robe with a clumsily tied turban on his head—his face beaming with joy, coming from Kalimat. He was usually bare-footed and appeared care-free and unconcerned about sharp-edged pebbles which were strewn on the road like a genuine Indian Sadhu. The name "Kalimat" was of an intriguing nature, and I often wondered if there was a real "Math" of Sadhus on this spur. The writer of the District Gazetteer was not very helpful in elucidating the mystery, and his explanation is rather prosaic. According to him, "Kalimat is an eminence 4 miles north of Almora attaining an elevation of 6,414 feet, and the name Kalimat or black earth is derived from the



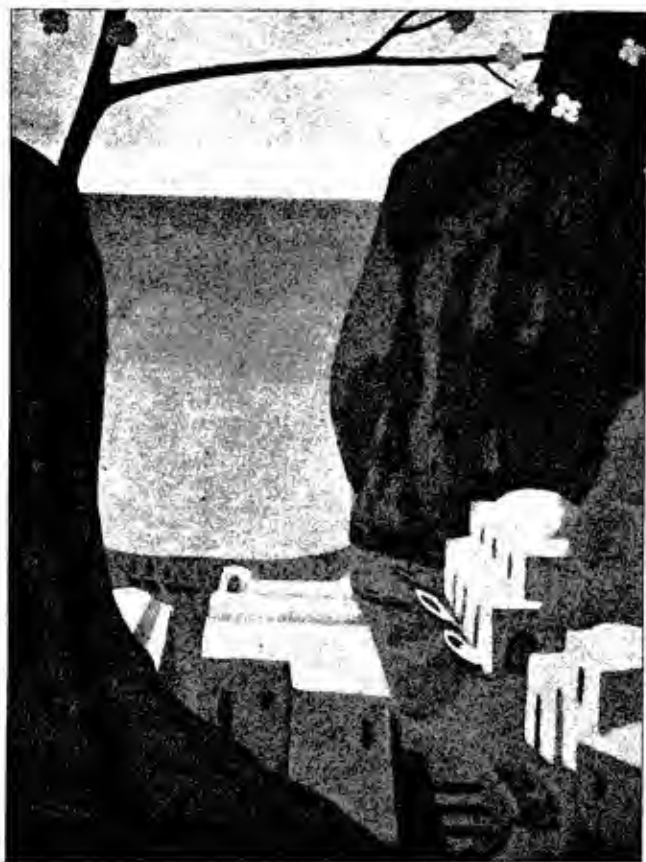
colour of the clay, which consists of an impure plumbago."

Kalimat is an ugly spur of mountain which shuts off the glorious snow-peaks of Trisul and Nandadevi from the residents of Almora. While at Almora I was seriously considering the quantity of dynamite sufficient to blow off the Kalimat, so that the people of Almora might have a clear and unrestricted view of the eternal Himalayan snows. Humanity owes a big debt to the discoverers of high explosives. If a few thousand human beings have been killed, and some buildings of sentimental value destroyed, it has also helped in the demolition of ugly slums and sooty buildings, which no amount of persuasion, legislation and compensation could have removed, and for whose preservation vested interests and rentier classes have been fighting tooth and nail. The black plumbago soil of Kalimat, blown sky high in the air, reminding one of a volcanic eruption will certainly be an awe-inspiring sight, and when the soil particles and stones have securely settled down in the Khud below, Rani-dhara, making a level stretch of land from the bridle-path leading to Binsar and Uday Shankar's Culture Centre, nobody will be a loser excepting a few persons who own decrepit old bungalows, relics of the

early nineteenth century, kept in sufficient repairs to extract rent.

### Earl and Achsah Brewster

Out of these relics, the only one for which I have sentimental value is Bhawani House, where the Brewsters live. I had seen a wonderful landscape of Earl H. Brewster at the house of Boshee Sen. E. H. Brewster and his wife Achsah, are Americans by birth and world citizens by conviction. They belong to that small but growing class of international nomads who regard the world as their home and humanity as their family. They have transcended the narrow bonds of patriotism, race, creed and colour and feel at home anywhere and everywhere. Like butterflies and bees, flitting from flower to flower, they wander over the surface of the earth from country to country irrespective of geographical or political divisions, enjoying their beauty and artistic treasures and enriching their personalities. After moving from land to land they eventually settle down and give expression to their rich experience in the form of books or pictures which win our admiration. To this category belong D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Anagarika Govinda, Nicholas Roerich, and Earl



E. H. BREWSTER

*Gulf of Salerno*

and Achsah Brewster. After wandering about in England, France and Italy, and successfully exhibiting their pictures in Paris, in Rome and leading a Bohemian life in the French Riviera, Florence, Capri and Ceylon they have settled down at Bhawani House on Kalimat, Almora in the Kumaon Himalayas.

Earl Henry Brewster was born in a village known as Chagrin Falls, in Ohio State of the United States of America in 1878. After preliminary training at the Cleveland School of Arts he went to New York. His wife Achsah comes from New Haven in Connecticut, U. S. A. She got training in painting at the New York School of Arts. Later on she studied at the Studio of Lucien Simon at Paris. She also visited the famous art galleries in England, Italy, France, Belgium and Holland. Her pictures were exhibited at the Independents, Gallery Cheron, and Autumn Salon in Paris and at the Secessione and Amatori in Rome and at the Tagore Gallery in Calcutta.

At Bhawani House, Almora, the Brewsters lead a simple life in peaceful surroundings. From the verandah of their house, where they spend most of their time, one can have a full view of the Himalayan snow-peaks of Trisul, Nandadevi and



E. H. BREWSTER AT A PARIS EXHIBITION

Nandakot and the beautiful cup-like valley below Binsar. Their faithful Kumaoni servant, Ottama is also their cook as well as house-keeper. Their main living room is L-shaped with an old ceiling cloth concealing rickety beams and slates. It is strewn with white woollen Thulmas and Namdas and saffron-coloured cushions and pillows. In one corner is a bronze statue of Buddha cast by Brewster himself. In front of the Buddha lies a copper vessel containing white lilies. Touching the wall opposite the entrance-door is a big book-case stacked with books on Buddhism, Hindu philosophy, Vedant and English and French literature. Hanging over the book-case is a picture of two pilgrims painted by Achsah. In another corner is a huge picture of Orpheus over the mantel-piece. Between two windows on the eastern side of the room is a wooden chowki covered with rugs and cushions on which Achsah sits in her white clothes. She is very fond of white clothes which go so well with her silver grey hair. On one side of her throne are easels and other oddments. On these easels Brewster shows his paintings to interested visitors after mounting them temporarily in broad golden frames, which a local carpenter prepares under his instructions. He is remarkably

patient and never gets tired or at least does not betray any signs of fatigue when showing his vast collection of paintings. He is seldom satisfied with the light in the room, for the colours show best in bright diffused light. The walls of the room look alive with paintings and the whole room has an atmosphere of peace and cheerfulness. The furniture is simple to the extreme and still the whole effect is artistic and pleasing.

### **Earl's Art: Influence of the Himalayas**

E. H. Brewster has drawn his inspiration from the Himalayas like the ancient Hindus and Nicholas Roerich. The Himalayas have exercised a great influence on the Indian thought and character for ages. To bring the common man in touch with their snow-covered peaks, the Himalayan beauty spots were sanctified and deified. Even now we see poor pilgrims footing hundreds of miles to Amar Nath, Badri Nath, Kedarnath, Rawalsar Kailash, and Mansarowar. The writer of Skanda Purana praising the beauty-spots of the Himalayas says: "In a hundred ages of the gods, I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachal. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himachal." Snow-

covered white peaks have a peculiar effect on the human mind. All over the world white colour is associated with purity. White clothes, white roses, white lilies, white snow-peaks all denote purity. Unfortunately 'purity' is one of the words with too many meanings, and is hence meaningless. To some purity means avoidance of irregular sexual relations, and to some physical cleanliness. To me it means conquest of evil emotions like anger, hatred and jealousy, and purging the mind of narrow and mean ideas. It is in this sense that I take this word. The silence of the inner Himalayan valleys coupled with the grandeur of snow-peaks and rarefied atmosphere free from dust and haze, has a peculiarly soothing effect on one. While gazing at the snow-peaks from Dhakuri Pass and at Martoli in Pindari valley I felt thrilled. In these places one forgets the petty jealousies, bickerings, local intrigues, meannesses and hatreds of the plains, and even the war. Moreover the effect of the rarefied atmosphere on the human nervous system needs careful investigation. It has been the common experience of many persons who have visited Tibet, and particularly the area around Kailash and Mansarowar, that one feels a sense of exhilaration in those high altitudes. Describing a visit to



Kailash and Mansarowar Roerich writes: "These glorious gems of the highest always fill the heart with a specially blissful tremor. When we were within a day's journey from Mansarowar the entire caravan already became uplifted." As compared with the mountain ranges of other countries or even Kashmir, the inner Himalayan ranges of Kumaon and Garhwal are specially favoured by nature. Smythe, the well-known traveller and mountaineer describing these regions writes: "Is there any region of the Himalayas or even of the world, to excel this region of the Himalayas in beauty and grandeur? Where else are there to be found such narrow and precipitous gorges, such serene vistas of alp, forest, snow-field and peak?" No wonder Brewsters selected Kumaon as their home after their wanderings. It is a fitting culmination of their world pilgrimage.

Comparing the art of Brewster and Roerich, we find that while both of them are deeply religious and both of them have been deeply affected by the Himalayas, they have an individuality of their own. Roerich is essentially the painter of snow-peaks and rocks of the inner Himalayas. By his peculiar use of colours he has immortalized on canvas the brilliantly coloured rocks of Tibetan plateau, narrow

gorges and precipitous valleys of Kulu and snow-covered giants of the inner ranges of the western Himalayas. However, Roerich's perception is stylistic or idealistic and not realistic. On the other hand Brewster's perception is realistic. Brewster has painted the Kumaon Himalayas as they appear to the unsophisticated eye. He has painted the snow-peaks of Nandadevi as well as the pine-covered slopes and terraced fields of the outer Himalayas as we see them. He has also captured and immortalized on canvas the quaint beauty of the hill-temples of Kumaon, the pink blossoms of jungle pears silhouetted against ebony-black branches, the white glory of bell-shaped *Datura* flowers, and the bluish metallic sheen of Chir pines bearing tassels of needle-like leaves. In his landscapes we can actually see Kumaon valleys filled with purple haze and marvellous effects of light and shade when sunlight filters through cumulus clouds into the valleys. By using darker paints in the foreground and lighter ones in the background he produces an almost stereoscopic effect in landscapes, and the valleys are seen in three dimensions. I have not seen perspective shown to better effect in any other Himalayan landscape by another artist. On the other hand

Roerich is not a landscape artist. He is one of those artists like Gauguin and Vroubel who are not satisfied with the plain reality, and like them he freely draws on his imagination and uses nature and its manifestations merely as a plastic material, which he works into forms unusual and unexpected, but far more impressive, and far more vigorous and strong. We never see crowds in the Himalayan pictures of Roerich, but only solitary human figures under the shadows of mighty rocks and snow-covered peaks. Contrasting with the rugged grandeur of brilliantly coloured rocks and mighty snow-covered mountains we see a Lama Priest, a Sadhu or a hill-man. By this method Roerich is able to convey an impression of the loneliness and peace which reign in these places, and by contrast the grandeur of rocks and mountains is emphasized as well as the insignificance of man before the blind forces of Nature.

### Religion and His Art

Besides landscapes Brewster has painted a number of great pictures of an abstract type. Some of these deal with the personalities of founders of religions like Buddha, Christ and Krishna. Brewster is a keen student of religion in a broader

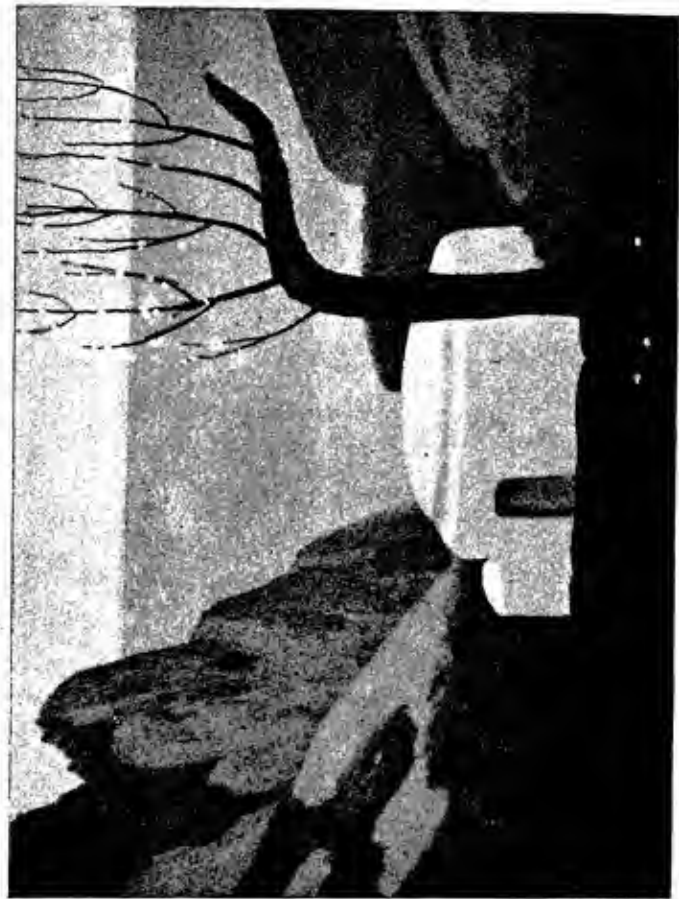
sense. He was attracted towards Buddhism in his early days and made a deep study of the literature available in European languages on this great and universal religion. Now he is interested in the philosophy of the Upanishads and Bhagwat Gita of Sri Krishna. On seeing that he has painted some very great pictures of the founders of religions and leaders of thought like Buddha, Krishna and Christ, I asked him if he could paint Nanak, the founder of Sikhism also. The existing paintings of Nanak are very unsatisfactory. Nanak was a great sceptic and a great reformer who purged Hinduism of many superstitions and rituals. He had a healthy scorn for ritualistic religion whether Hinduism or Islam, and had the courage of openly scoffing at the "Namaz" prayers of Moslems even at Mecca, and the offering of oblations to the souls of their dead ancestors by the Hindus at Hardwar. He ridiculed the so-called sacred thread of the Hindus and the caste arrogance of the Brahman priests. He preached a universal religion based on common sense, and had he succeeded in achieving synthesis of Hinduism and Islam, India would have been spared a good deal of misfortune. Brewster told me that he would like to read Nanak's writings before attempting to paint him. Before painting

Buddha he made a deep study of Buddhism, and after acquainting himself with the life of Buddha and his teachings, he painted him successfully. Roerich, too, follows the same method. For some time Roerich painted scenery for operas in the United States of America. These pictorial curtains were highly imbued with the spirit of the music of the opera and were very much admired. When asked about the secret of these unusual paintings he replied: "I never paint the scenery for an opera or a ballet without first having an intimate acquaintance with both the drama and the music. I study both deeply in order to get at the spirit that lies behind both, which spirit must be one and the same if the work is to be great and lasting. Having steeped myself in the central idea, the inspiration which gave birth to the work and permitted it to take possession of me, I then endeavour to express the same thought and the same inspiration in my painting." These ideas of Roerich and Brewster should serve as a guide to our younger artists in India, some of whom regard art as an expression of transient impulses and momentary emotions only.



E. H. BREWSTER

*Buddha and the Wounded Swan*



E. H. BREWSTER

*White House, Capri*

### **Influence of Abstract Art**

The twentieth century is a century of revolt against complexity. Ours is a scientific age and science implies simplicity and directness. Nothing is so abhorrent to a scientific mind as vagueness, obscurantism and confusion. Hence we see the expression of this revolt in various phases of our life. In our social and economic life this revolt has expressed itself in the simplification of class relations and planning of production and distribution under socialism. Socialism is essentially a revolt against the muddle and confusion of laissez faire capitalism. In the art of building and decoration this revolt has manifested itself in modern architecture which has eliminated the ornamentation, scrolls and florid designs of earlier eras substituting plain cubistic buildings designed for utility, comfort and beauty, and modern plain furniture with no depressions and concavities to serve as repositories of dust. On the emotional side this revolt has knocked the bottom out of many superstitions and ancient humbug which passed under the name of religion. When all these phases of our life were affected, art could not remain in a vacuum. In art this revolt has found expression in Surrealism,



Cubism and abstract art. In this craving for simplicity, however, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme, and to employ the terminology of Hegelians, Cubism, Surrealism, and Constructivism are the antithesis of the thickly laid confusions of the conventionals of the nineteenth and of earlier centuries. As Peter Thoene observes: "They want the utmost simplicity after all the confusion; they want the earth after too many heavens; they want to rediscover the foundations in order to build upon them afresh."

The abstract paintings of Brewster are the quintessence of his art. Simplicity of composition is the key-note of these pictures. By simplifying the subject matter, by eliminating the non-essentials, and by emphasizing the essentials by skilful use of colours he tries to abstract the real value of objects or persons. However, he has not carried the process of abstraction to its logical limits like Kandinsky who proceeded to eliminate every memory of visible objects in nature from his painting. Brewster's paintings are intelligible even to the layman who is not conversant with the new language and symbolism of the abstract and the superconcrete art. At the same time like Kandinsky, Klee, Gropius, and other luminaries of the

Bauhaus, Brewster believes in the creative power of the idea, which is an important basis of his abstract pictures.

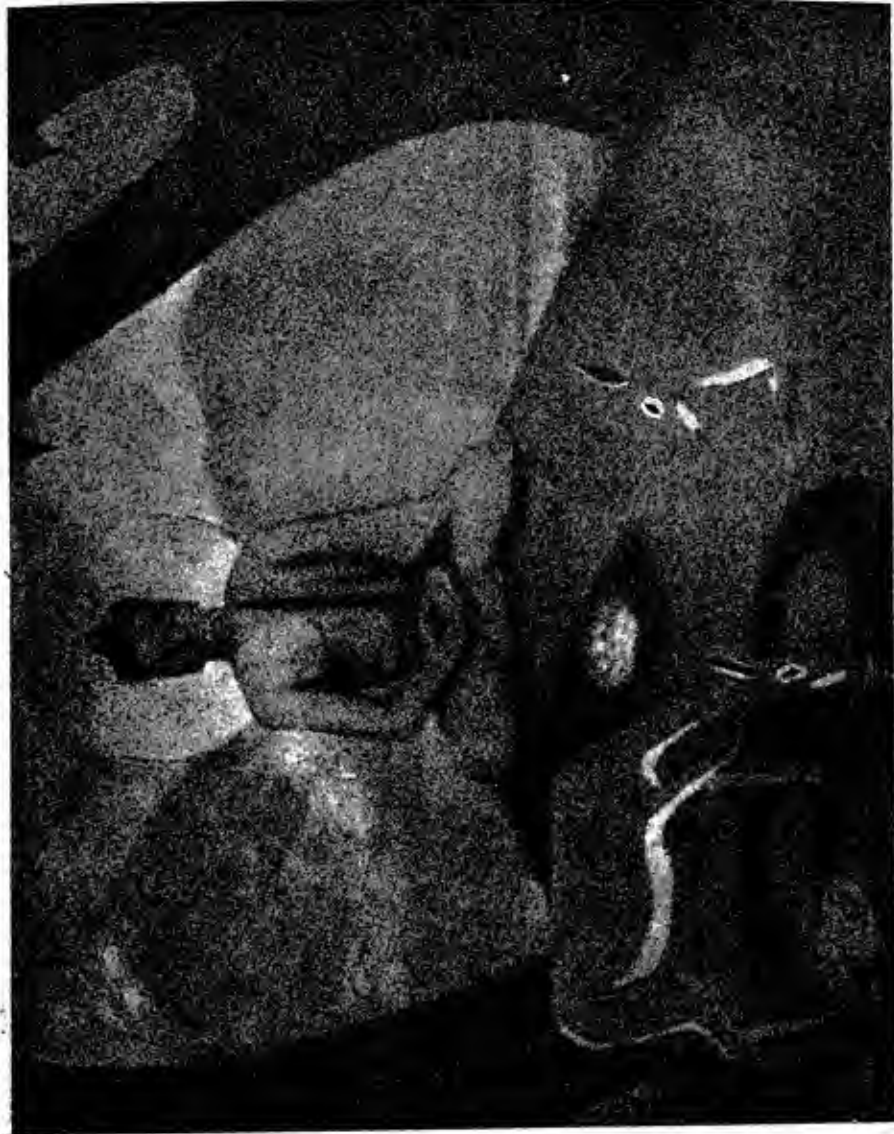
There are various methods by which abstract artists achieve destruction of form. Lyonel Feininger, the originator of German form of Cubism, according to Peter Thoené gradually arrived at destruction of form by way of grotesque caricature.

Describing the method of the abstraction Anagarika Govinda observes : "Abstract art proceeds in the inductive and constructive way by emphasizing and developing essential features by which all secondary features are suppressed, if not entirely eliminated, so that life which was hidden under the surface becomes intensified and more real to our consciousness." Brewster achieves abstraction by a process of simplification of form and not by its actual destruction. As an example, we may take Brewster's famous picture "Buddha and the Swan." In this picture he has reduced the personality of Buddha into its elements. We see Buddha's youthful face with a straight Grecian nose, full of intelligence, mercy and compassion, a gentle hand caressing a wounded white swan with a gaping scarlet wound. In a corner is a yellow lily, symbolic of

the life force. It is so simple in its composition, and yet so full of meaning.

### **Buddha in Meditation**

One of his very great pictures is "Buddha in Meditation." The personality of Buddha has found no better exponent in art than Brewster, and he has painted him in different styles. Being essentially religious by nature with a depth of feeling attained by so few he has given such a serene and divine expression to the face of his Buddhas, which we do not find elsewhere. In an early picture we find Buddha painted against a cubistic background. Later on he painted him with a range of mountains behind, and a pool containing lotuses in front with two innocent deer browsing near it. In a recent picture he simplified the surroundings still further: behind the figure of Buddha draped in saffron robes, we see two conical peaks painted in blue, framed in two dark trunks of trees, which look like massive pines, but they bear broad angiospermous leaves. Some people might say that these trees appear unreal. The object of the artist, however, is to bring the personality of Buddha into prominence, and to achieve that end, he does not care about external forms. If the object of art



E. H. BREWSTER

*Buddha in Meditation*

were merely portraying of reality, photography with its advanced technique, can perhaps do it more successfully. The artist on the other hand does not care about external forms, as Govinda says : "In order to escape the danger of losing the essential value of art by submitting it to external forms of nature, the artist again and again has to break these forms, and to extract their intrinsic value from them. He has to *abstract* : literally to pull off the cloak of concrete phenomena and habitual associations which divert the attention, and mislead the mind towards the surface, until they have become the pure manifestations of his experience." Here in this picture we see two deer with beady eyes and agile bodies, symbolic of innocence, looking at the face of Buddha. The face of Buddha, surrounded by an orange halo, radiates all the finer virtues of mankind, like sympathy, gentleness, and knowledge. Draped in saffron robes, we see a human being purified of all selfish cravings and desires which torment ordinary mortals. The figure of Buddha painted in yellow appears like a flame radiating warmth and light. The mountains in the background are painted in blue which is the complementary colour of yellow or orange. Blue is a passive colour, the colour of space and infinity.

The positive passivity of the blue mountains contrasts with the vegetative passivity of green grass below and with the yellow colour of Buddha's drapery, thus throwing his figure into prominence and also creating a calm and peaceful atmosphere. This picture is also an interesting example of colour symbolism. On seeing Buddha's peaceful and calm face, one shares his great experience of "Nirvana." Never has Buddha been painted so successfully. Brewster's "Buddha in Meditation" is a great picture which grows on you from day to day, and it reflects the greatness and sincerity of the artist, who must have painted it in a meditative mood, enthralled by an emotion, which only some mystics and Yogis experience. To quote Govinda again: "Just as the human face is the expression of a certain stage in the development of the individual, in the very same way an abstract picture represents a certain mental or emotional state in the development of an artist." While the Yogi is unable to convey his experience to others like a dumb man who cannot explain to others the delicious taste of sweets, the artist finds an outlet to his emotions, and some of them who are really great like Brewster capture elusive ideas from the realm of imagination and portray them with paint and



E. H. BREWSTER

*Sri Krishna*

brushes on canvas so that ordinary human beings are also able to share their experience.

### Sri Krishna

Brewster's "Sri Krishna" is an example of the purity of his colours, their exquisite blending and simplicity of setting. Krishna is the god of love, embodiment of joy and beauty, delicate like a woman, playful and full of youthful tricks. This is how we find him painted by others. Sometimes he is shown as a small boy perched upon a tree playing a flute, with the clothes of milk-maids piled on branches around him, while the nude milk-maids gaze at him with a mixed expression of bashfulness and feigned annoyance. Sometimes he is shown as a delicate young man dancing with his "Gopis" under a full moon. But what about Krishna, the philosopher, the Krishna of Bhagwad Gita? Do we find him painted anywhere with all his ripe wisdom, which has still remained fresh in spite of the passage of thousands of years. According to some, Krishna with his peculiar blue body and yellow Pitambar is the universe itself whose body is the blue sky wrapped in golden yellow rays of the sun or cosmic radiation filling the darkness of the interstellar space. So far as I am



aware, only Brewster has painted Sri Krishna, the lover-philosopher with success. Surrounded by two cherry trees with pink blossoms, which make the setting cheerful, symbolic of spring, we find Krishna standing in front of a white cow. The blue figure of Krishna swathed in a saffron robe contrasts with the white coat of the cow, and looks graceful and well-poised. His limbs are delicate and his face radiates youthful energy. Krishna's painting reminds me of a visit to Brewster's house in September 1939. We were going out on a long tour towards Pindari glacier.

As we were going out for a long period, we could not resist the temptation of seeing Brewsters whose house on Kalimat was on our way to Binsar. When we reached their house after a stiff climb, we were greeted in the verandah by Brewster who was wearing a Khadi cap, and was wrapping a Kashmeri shawl on his shoulders. Frail and anaemic, unable to move on account of a malady which had affected her lower limbs, Achsah was seated on a wooden Chowki, busy worshipping a bronze image of Krishna, burning incense and scattering flowers. On seeing us, her face lit up with an angelic expression which reminded me of the spirits draped in white which she had painted in some of



*Crucifixion*

E. H. BREWSTER



E. H. BREWSTER

*Crucifixion*

her pictures. The Brewsters are Krishna-Bhagats and this explains the secret of the successful Krishna painting.

### Crucifixion

One of his great pictures, in which he has portrayed triumph of human mind over sorrow and suffering, is "Crucifixion." Against a heavy grey sky we see the frail figure of Christ hanging on a cross. His arms are-limp, his head droops on one side, but his face is calm. In a corner we see the pale face of his mother tortured by agony and sorrow. In this painting we see humanity itself tortured and crucified, but still resolute and confident of the future, for the finer virtues of mankind find expression only in times of distress, when humanity is ground in the mill-stone of destiny. It is only in stress and struggle, sorrow and suffering that mankind evolves, otherwise we would have remained blobs of protoplasm floating in sea-water, or at best anthropoid apes swinging from branches of trees.

### Wings of the Morning

One day he showed me a remarkable painting which he had named as "Wings of the Morning." In this he has shown an Apollo-like young man standing in front of a white horse. In the back-

ground are two blue mountains partly covered with white snow. He explained to me that the young man in the picture represents the "Kalki Autar," the reincarnation of Vishnu, who, according to the Hindus, will usher in the Golden Age of "Satyuga." I explained to him the Golden Age will not be ushered in suddenly by a supernatural being, but already there are thousands of young men with ideals enduring untold hardships and sacrificing their lives combating the menace of Fascism and all it implies. They are our "Kalki Autars." To me this Apollo-like young man represents the modern young man with ideals fighting for world culture and humanity. The dark mountains in the background represent the valley of death, sorrow and suffering. Yet the youth is hopeful and confident. The white steed represents science, knowledge, power and energy. Guided by science, which demonstrates the equality of man irrespective of race, colour or class and his capacity to subdue the blind forces of nature and ultimately harnessing them to the service of mankind as a whole, man will still emerge triumphant from the valley of shadow of death to fashion a new world order based on class and political justice and equal opportunity for all.



E. H. BREWSTER

*Wings of the Morning*



E. H. BREWSTER

*Shiva's Tandava Dance*

### Shiva's Dance

During my visits I saw Brewster painting "Shiva's Tandava," depicting Shiva's dance of destruction, the Tandava. As the story goes, Shiva was deeply perturbed over the austerities of some ascetics, somewhere near Chidambaram in South India. Shiva descended from his retreat in Mount Kailash in Tibet disguised as a mendicant. The heretical ascetics lighted a fire and chanted 'Mantras' for the destruction of their rival from the Himalayan snows. Out of this fire arose a tiger, a serpent and a black dwarf. Shiva crushed the tiger and the dwarf, and twined the snake around his neck like a necklace. The ascetics were utterly floored. In that moment of triumph, Shiva danced the Tandava, the dance of destruction which shook the whole universe, reducing it to primal elements. Brewster has put all the fire of his soul in Shiva. In one hand he holds fire, and in the other a bell. His matted locks, his looks and his whole being radiate a joyous energy. In the background we see a red haze symbolic of a dissolving universe. How truly does this picture represent our own age, the Age of Destruction, with scores of young men, little Shivas in their own way, in bomber aeroplanes,



destroying what human labour has created by years of toil. This mad dance of Tandava is going on in the sky, almost everywhere at present, with houses, factories and hospitals reduced to rubble. Shiva is truly the god of Fascism. However, in Brewster's gentle hands even Shiva undergoes transformation. Shiva's face shows a strange transfiguration and it is not the face of a destroyer intoxicated with power of destruction that we see, but of a creator filled with hope for the future. Destruction and creation are inseparably connected with each other and you cannot create something new without destroying the existing order of things. So Brewster's Shiva is not the god of Fascism, but of World Reconstruction.

### **His Portraits**

Brewster has also painted a number of good portraits. To make a good portrait, you must have not only a capable painter but also a patient sitter, and he has been particularly lucky in the choice of his sitters. Unlike Gainsborough he has not painted flippant ladies from the fashionable Bath, nor uniformed generals like Raeburn. Being serious-minded and pacifist he would not have been a success with either of them. He moves



ACHSAH BREWSTER (*Portrait*)

among the religiously minded intellectuals of Mirtola, and he has been able to obtain good likenesses of them in his portraits. He is particularly proud of the portrait of Mataji of Mirtola (Mrs. Chakravarti). In this portrait he has been able to convey the gentleness and nobleness of the lady in her facial expression. The environment in which the lady lives is also effectively conveyed by the mountains and cupola of a temple in the background. His portrait of Mr. Poole is also a good record of this handsome scholar and artist. Another good one is that of Mr. Sorensen, the Swiss ascetic. He has also painted a number of portraits of his wife Achsah. Instead of giving pale reflections of her, he has tried to paint her directly. She is a model sitter, for she can sit calmly for hours without moving a limb or even winking an eye. Yet he could not paint her successfully as he confessed to me: "I cannot get the likeness of my wife. When I am too much interested in a person, I cannot attain that objectivity which I get when painting an outsider." In this he is right. To draw a good portrait the artist must achieve detachment and this is not possible in some cases when one knows a person intimately. We miss her angelic expression in the portraits which Brewster has drawn of Achsah.



ACHSAH BREWSTER

*Jack Fruit*

The influence of his wife Achsah on his art is plainly discernible in some of his earlier pictures like "Vanity" and "Printemps Glace." Even in his "Blue Madonna" we see a reflection of the features of Achsah's face in her younger days. G. H. Poole in his note on Brewster's Art narrates an interesting anecdote about the romantic circumstances under which the artists met. He writes: "Towards the end of this time spent in New York, some of his friends noticed that he had introduced into his pictures a type of woman which reminded them of a lady whom they knew but who was as yet unknown to the artist. On the strength of this resemblance, they brought about a meeting between the two, with the result that Earl Henry Brewster married Achsah Barlow, herself an artist."

### Achsah's Art

Achsah herself is a great and a successful artist of the tropical jungle. Aldous Huxley impressed and overwhelmed with the beauty of tropical jungles in Java observes: "No good pictures have ever been painted, so far as I am aware of tropical landscapes. The real reason I believe why painters avoid the tropics is that they know them to be unpaintable." I am confident that Aldous Huxley will change his



ACHSAH BREWSTER

*The Little Black Boy*



ACHSAH BREWSTER

*Under the Amberstia Tree*

opinion if he sees Achsah's pictures. She has successfully captured the richness and picturesqueness of tropical landscapes in her pictures, which are riots in colours. In her pictures we see graceful palms, fire-coloured *Amherstia* blossoms, golden yellow laburnums, and coffee-coloured full breasted maidens lying languidly on velvet green grass. Achsah has been successful in distilling the artistic essence of the tropical orient.

Achsah is very fond of brown and red colours. Very few European and American artists have painted the brown-coloured humanity with so much feeling and sympathy. Her "Little Black Boy" is a charming study of a North African boy surrounded by white herons. In her picture named "Jack Fruit," she has shown a Singhalese mother with a daughter and a baby. The ripe Jack Fruit bursting out of the stem of the tree, the big and innocent eyes of the baby, and graceful curves of the woman's body together make a very pleasing picture. Her pictures "Under the *Amherstia* Tree," and "Tamil Mother and Child" fall in same category. There is an element of design in all these pictures. As Mr. Poole has rightly pointed out: "The element of design is present in all her pictures and forms the basis of their structure.



They cannot be rightly understood unless this is perceived. In obedience to the principle in every picture a unity is achieved whereby the figures blend with the background in a harmony in which the whole expresses one rhythm of colour and form. The figures are not just human beings superimposed on some natural scene, they become an expression of the scene itself." For example, we may take the picture "Under the Amherstia Tree." Only the brown beauty of a Singhalese woman, her elegant drapery, and jet-black hair can harmonize with orange-red Amherstia blossoms. Her presence softens the blaze of Amherstia flowers. Suppose Achsah had placed a blonde white woman under the Amherstia, how absurd and out of place she would have looked, her blonde yellow hair jarring against the red Amherstias. Similarly only a brown Tamil woman can be properly painted with a background of twining tropical creepers. These pictures also demonstrate the biological principle of adaptation. It is not only the animals who are adapted to their environment, but also human races with their different hues of colours which they have developed in the course of many generations.



ACHSAH BREWSTER

*Detail of a triptych in Principessa Pignatelli  
Memorial School, Calabria. D. H. Lawrence  
who stayed with the Brewsters in Italy sat  
for the figure of the Christian ascetic.*

Besides pictures of the tropics, Achsah has painted a number of murals and semimurals in Italy. She has drawn inspiration from the Christian Primitives, early painters of Italy who have decorated the walls of churches and monasteries in that country. In these murals she has shown the ancient Christian saints and ascetics. In one of these which she painted in Principessa Pignatelli Memorial School, Calabria, she has painted D. H. Lawrence as a Christian ascetic.

Apart from her tropical pictures and murals, she has painted some very great pictures. Her picture of "Belur Ghat" with clean-shaven Hindu Sanyasis is an interesting study. The figures of the Sadhus, the temples, and the river, all together represent a phase of Indian life. "Benares" is another simple study of a complex subject. One of her pictures she still had at Almora, and which appealed to me most was "St. Francis of Assissi." In this the famous Christian ascetic is shown in the company of yellow birds. We see these little birds feeding at his feet and roosting on his shoulders. The lean and hungry face of St. Francis has a strange resemblance with D. H. Lawrence, an intimate friend of Brewsters who lived with them



ACHSAH BREWSTER

*St. Francis of Assisi*

in Italy. Achsah told me that in fact Lawrence was her model for this picture.

- In the solitude of Almora it was a rare privilege and pleasure to see the pictures of Brewsters on week-ends. Sundays during my stay at Almora were real red-letter days in my life and I was never tired of watching their pictures from different angles, and the Brewsters also had exemplary patience. When I look back on the period of my stay at Almora, the happy recollections of my visits of Kalimat come foremost in my mind, I often think about this happy couple who were leading a blissful existence, oblivious of the turmoil of the world, living in a world of their own, a world of joy and beauty. During their stay in Almora, they have made a substantial contribution to the cultural and artistic life of India, the country of their adoption to whose people they have given their best.
- To the western countries also they have done great service by interpreting the life and thought of the Indian people in their immortal paintings.



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